Press-Gazette photo

About 20 people attended groundbreaking ceremonies held Monday on Scray's Hill near De Pere. Facilities for Green Bay's fifth television station, WLRE, will be located there.

Ground broken for new TV station

Groundbreaking ceremonies on Monday marked the start of construction on the Green Bay area's fifth television station.

Station WLRE will be the first independent, commercial station in this part of the state. It is scheduled to begin telecasting in mid-August.

The facility will be located in the Town of Glenmore on Scray's Hill, southeast of De Pere. It will include studios, transmitter, master and production control rooms, audio recording booth, engineering and production. The tower will be located nearby.

Owners of the Channel 26 (UF) station include Lyle R. Evans, chairman of the board of directors; Andrew J. Brusda, president; and Gerald D. Newman, secretary.

Channel 26 will serve communities within a 40-mile radius of Green Bay with 250,000 watts of power from an antenna 750 feet above average terrain.

The full-color station will feature programming for family viewing, emphasizing sports on the local level, quality programming for children and full-length feature motion pictures. Professional and collegiate sports, variety and talk shows and selected religious programs will also be shown.

Bjorn Construction Co. has been named general contractor for the 4,000-square-foot building.

Executive, sales and clerical offices will be located in downtown Green Bay.

Evans noted the start of construction ends nearly three years of planning for the new station.

"When the FCC authorized the move of our transmitting facilities to a mechanically superior location on Scray's Hill, it also waived the requirement that the studios and operations center be located in the city of license, Green Bay," Evans said.

The tower erection crew is expected to begin construction of the transmitting tower June 20. Installation of satellite receiving equipment will begin in mid-July.

TV station sold, wants 'new face'

By Warren Gerds
Of the Press-Gazette

On the heels of the completed sale of Channel 26 this week, the TV station plans a number of changes.

Saturday morning, the station intends to begin an on-air shift to the call letters WGBA.

Approval of the switch from WLRE is expected today from the Federal Communications Commission.

"We wanted to change them just to put on a new face, so to speak," said James Tomlin, general manager. "With the entire station, it's fresh owners, additional fresh programming, a fresh look, a fresh theme."

Aug. 5, a federal bankruptcy judge approved the sale to Family Group Ltd. of Tampa, Fla.

The station filed for bankruptcy in January, when 56 percent of its stock was owned by Newman Companies Inc. of Green Bay, an investment firm which also had filed for bankruptcy.

The last step in the station changing hands came Monday. The FCC gave approval.

"Now I can run a television station again instead of spending all my time trying to sell one," Tomlin said Wednesday. "I'm a manager now, not a broker.

"Of course, there's still a lot to be wrapped up. I will continue on as president of TV-26 until all the receivables and all the money's been disbursed to the right people."

The WGBA call letters have no special significance, Tomlin said, though "some people have mentioned 'Green Bay Area.'"

The call letters WLRE contain the intials of Lyle R. Evans, who conceived of and did the groundwork for the station. Evans is director of engineering for Family Group and remains in Green Bay.

The call-letter change means TV-26 will have new on-air identification bits, including new music and a new theme — "The Fun's on Us."

Among changes in programming that begin Saturday, TV-26 will no longer operate 24 hours a day. It will be off, in general, from 1 to 5:30 a.m.

The audience was small in that period, Tomlin said. "It was virtually an all-cost, no-revenue situation after 1 a.m.," he said.

A few lineup changes have been made. Weekdays, beginning Monday, the station will have a noon-to-2 p.m. block of four new, back-to-back programs of news and lifestyles; the children's show

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"Thundercats" at 4:30; reruns of "Benson" at 6; "Carson Comedy Classics" (excerpts from Johnny Carson's "Tonight" show) at 6:30 and reruns of "Mannix" at 7.

"Bowling Strikes and Spares" is moving to Saturday and Sunday at 12:30 p.m. as "an experimental thing," Tomlin said. It has been on at 7 p.m. weeknights and generating a following. Tomlin said more than 4,000 postcards were received this week from viewers who want to be "bowling buddies" on the show.

The station also plans to build new offices and studios. Tomlin said a downpayment as been made on a site on North Road west of Highway 41 and north of I-72 near Austin Straubel Field.

At present, TV-26 is a split operation. Tomlin said, "We're doing our switching editing and on-the-air stuff at the transmitter (on Scray's Hill southeast of De Pere), and we're doing our production, operations and sales here (in leased space at 1145 Pine St.)."

Having everything under one roof in a building of more than 10,000 square feet will be more economical and efficient, Tomlin said. Construction could begin this fall, depending on the weather, he said.

TV-26 is the first Family Group-owned station that's in operation, but that is changing rapidly. The firm is scheduled to go on the air today with WFTX in Cape Coral, Fla. Also, it will be building a station in La Crosse, and Tomlin said construction planning is in progress.

He said there will be some sharing of programs between TV-26 and the La Crosse station, WIAX.